2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

that the Yao occupied in Central Africa as middlemen and traders. As far back as 1798 Lacerda described the Yao rôle as active traders. They bartered ivory, slaves, beeswax and tobacco with the Arabs along the East Coast of Africa for guns, gun-powder, cloth and beads. We cannot easily estimate what proportion of the population was engaged in whole-time slaving and trading. The larger proportion must have found it necessary to cultivate their gardens of finger-millet and sorghum in the rainy season to supply them with the major food crops. It seems likely that slave-raiding and trading were occupations mostly followed during the dry season.

The Yao therefore had become accustomed to a variation of activities and division of labour, at least a century before the Whites came to Nyasaland. Their wants at this time had already become sufficiently diversified to include cloth, beads, gun-powder and guns. All these trade goods are more durable than the foodstuffs which are the measure of wealth among a people who support themselves entirely by their own produce. But the individual want for these trade goods was limited, and the Yao used their surplus rather as capital for trading farther inland with other tribes.

There is considerable evidence, both from my informants and the writings of early travellers, that these trade goods—ivory, cloth and slaves—came to be used as currency, and most people recognized a fixed relationship between the three commodities. A female slave could be exchanged for an amount of calico or ivory that was constant over fairly large parts of Central Africa; the value of a tusk of ivory could be expressed in calico in the same way. By enterprise, therefore, in trading and raiding, an individual could accumulate wealth in the form of calico, guns, beads, ivory or slaves. But the personal consumption of trade goods is of necessity limited, so that the Yao preferred to accumulate their wealth in the form of slaves. The reason for this lies in the general political structure of the early chiefdoms, which I describe later. Slaves were not only labourers and serfs; they also increased the military and political power of their masters. At the same time slaves could be sent to the coast in a caravan and bartered for cloth, or, since they were always prized, they could be used to settle claims for compensation from aggrieved neighbours. The slave trade therefore, although related to domestic

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slavery in that a trader could at any moment send some of his own slaves to the coast, was actually quite a separate institution.

Although the advent of the White Administration stopped both domestic slavery and the slave-trade to the coast, both of which were vitally important elements in Yao economy, it did nothing to decrease or reduce the variety of the wants of the Africans. On the contrary, it obviously increased those wants. The missionaries, who were the first Whites to settle in Nyasaland, were forced to import large quantities of cloth and beads so that they could buy foodstuffs and pay their labourers. They quite unintentionally, therefore, became competitors with the Yao in this trade. By some accounts their goods were both superior and cheaper. As early as 1878 the African Lakes Company was sponsored by the Church of Scotland Mission, so that it could take over the trading part of their dealings with the Africans. The planters and traders who began to settle in the highlands after 1890 brought more and more cloth, beads and other trade goods into Nyasaland to pay wages and buy foodstuffs.

When the Protectorate was proclaimed in 1891 and the Administration started to put down domestic slavery and the trade in slaves to the coast, the monopoly of trade in goods fell directly into the hands of the Whites. After 1893, when coinage was introduced, the economy of the country rapidly changed from one based on barter with slaves and ivory as the main outgoing commodities, and slaves, calico, beads and brass rings as the incoming commodities, to an economy in which the wants had become even more diversified. In 1895, the *British Central African Gazette* could record:

> The wants of the people of this part of the world not long ago were limited to sufficient calico to clothe the family, but in one short year their wants now include boots, size and quality a minor point, turbans, coats, and in fact at a distance the half-naked native of yesterday has the appearance of Sikh soldiery.[1]

That the Yao took to the use of money is illustrated by the Acting Commissioner's statement in 1897: "The Yao thoroughly appreciate having a currency. It has proved, in fact, a great step towards civilising the native of this part of Africa. He is now able to accumulate his earnings, which formerly in the days of a

[1] Vol. i, 2 (Sept. 26th, 1894).

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

436 calico currency was an impossibility.'[1] The Africans could hardly have resisted the change over to a money economy. The taxation system introduced in 1893 was based on the Governor of 436 Zululand's Proclamation III of 1887, and ruled that a tax defaulter 651 was liable to be conscripted for labour until he had earned the 687 amount of his tax. Coffee estates owned by Whites in the Highlands were at the same time in need of labour.[2] Tax was then taken in kind but it was soon changed to cash as a further inducement to Africans to come on to the labour market. The Africans were forced into the cash economy of the Protectorate even if they were unwilling. The measures were so successful that in 1899 the *Gazette* announced that the labour market in Blantyre was flooded.[3]

Modern Economic Structure

177 In modern Nyasaland, the wants of the Africans have become even more varied than they were in the earlier days. Most younger 511 men wear European-type clothing and shoes. Many own bicycles and sewing machines. Many houses have glass windows and panelled doors and most of them are furnished with some rough furniture which has been bought from local craftsmen. Many have beds and mosquito nets. Few women cannot boast of enamel dishes to replace their clay pottery or china cups to replace drinking gourds. The food habits of the peoples too have broadened. Most households use sugar these days, and many people drink tea. I should say that all households occasionally buy soap. Certainly all need salt, which formerly was burnt from the saline grass around Lake Shirwa or dissolved out of special soils in Portuguese East Africa. The stock-lists of an Indian-owned village shop in Chiwalo's area and of an African-owned canteen in the same area, which I have set out in Appendix A, indicate the range of the wants of the modern African. 434 It is clear that these wants are over and above food require- 463 ments. The people in these tribal areas live primarily on the

[1] *Report of the Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central African Protectorate for April 1896 to March 1897.* C. 8438.

[2] See the *B.C.A. Gazette*, iii, 5 (March 1895), and iii, 17 (Sept. 15th, 1896), which print advertisements offering 'native labour arranged for and supplied to plantations at a commission of 7s. 6d. a head'.

[3] *B.C.A. Gazette*, vi, 6 (June 24th, 1899).